

EVERETT HERALD

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Get one college worry out of the way early

If children truly learn by example, then parents have an excellent opportunity to teach them how to avoid procrastination and invest wisely at the same time, thanks to our state's prepaid tuition program.

Like a high school student scrambling to write a 10-page report the night before it's due, many parents find themselves scrambling to come up with money for their children's college education just a few short years before they have to drop them off at the dorms. If anything, the state's Guaranteed Education Tuition program provides parents the opportunity to set aside money when their kids are young so they know they can pay tuition and other expenses well before high school graduation rolls around.

A good deal before, the program might be fine-tuned this legislative session to allow more people to participate. Pending bills would require that only one person - the future student or the person buying the units - be a state resident.

A few years ago, when the stock market was booming, doing their own investing for college might have seemed the better option to some parents. But when the market fared poorly people saw the stability and value of a flexible prepaid program such as GET. And with an estimated 50,000 accounts by the end of this month, GET is growing in popularity.

A full 15-credit load at Everett Community College currently costs \$771 per quarter. That doesn't include books. At the University of Washington one quarter of undergraduate tuition for a resident is \$1,762. If you have little ones, just imagine what those numbers will be in 10, 15 or 18 years considering that tuition costs at public colleges are rising about 7 percent each year.

At \$61 a unit (100 units equals one year of tuition at the most expensive public university in the state) a little math will tell any parent it's a good deal if their kids are young right now.

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to tune out the inevitable headlines in the coming years bemoaning tuition increases, because you and your family already locked in a good deal?

Tuition for our community colleges and universities isn't going anywhere but up. Planning and a little discipline now could mean a solid education for your kids and some financial security for you later on. Best of all, perhaps, it sends a strong message to your children that you value education and so should they.

For more information on the GET program, visit www.get.wa.gov.